Policy on Service to Customer Agencies

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INTRODUCTION[1]

The Laboratory's goal is to provide its customers with accurate, clear, unambiguous, and objective testing results in accordance with all written laboratory policies, protocols, and procedures. Laboratory management is committed to impartiality. The Laboratory's activities shall be conducted impartially and structured and managed to safeguard impartiality. All personnel of the Laboratory, either internal or external, that could influence the laboratory activities shall act impartially, be competent and work in accordance with the laboratory's management system. The Laboratory shall be responsible for the impartiality of its laboratory activities and will not allow commercial, financial, or other pressures to compromise this. Threats to impartiality could include such things as threats that arise from a person or body acting in their own interest (i.e., financial self-interest), threats that arise from a person or body being too familiar with or trusting of another person instead of seeking objective evidence, and threats that arise from a person or body having the perception of being coerced openly or secretively. The Laboratory adheres to the "ANAB Guiding Principles of Professional Responsibility for Forensic Service Providers and Forensic Personnel" and reviews these guidelines annually (see Policy on Standards of Conduct and Professional Development QT43449). Any potential threats to impartiality must be reported to a Unit Supervisor and/or the Laboratory Director immediately. He or she will investigate the potential risk to impartiality and take any actions necessary. If a risk to impartiality is identified, the laboratory will initiate a Risks and Opportunities workflow (see the Policy on Reporting Quality Variances and Addressing Risks and Opportunities QT46422) and document how it will eliminate or minimize such risk. The Laboratory shall seek to identify risks to impartiality on an on-going basis, and these risks and any conclusions are discussed, at a minimum, at the annual Management Review meeting.

Laboratory personnel shall also endeavor to assist their customers[2] with the use of science and technology to further justice within Kern County. The Laboratory will strive to continuously improve their processes and services to exceed customer expectations and to ensure compliance with regulatory standards.

The entire Kern Regional Crime Laboratory (KRCL) shares these responsibilities.

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[1] ISO/IEC 17025:2017 4.1.1, 4.1.2, 4.1.3, 4.1.4, 6.2.1; AR 3125 4.1.3.1

[2] A customer is a person organization that requests the testing services of the laboratory. The laboratory's Quality Management System Manual (QT39622) defines customers of the Kern Regional Crime Laboratory to be both law enforcement agencies that are geographically located within the County of Kern, and prosecuting attorneys who work within the Kern County District Attorney's Office. The Laboratory also serves any other law enforcement or criminal justice agencies that are outside the county when directed to do so by the District Attorney or Assistant District Attorney.

SCOPE OF FORENSIC SERVICES

The Kern Regional Crime Laboratory offers a variety of forensic services to its client agencies, listed in the table below. Also listed are the expected time frames in which the laboratory strives to complete each type of service request.[3] Turn-around-times are computed by the LIMS at the moment that requests are set and should be used by analysts to prioritize case workload. In general, laboratory personnel work cases on a "first-in-first-out" basis. However, the District Attorney's Office may request that certain cases be worked on shortened timelines to meet court deadlines.

Service Area	Service Description	TAT (Days)
Technical Management Team	Administrative Closure	5
Evidence Control Unit	Case Information Release* (Discovery)	10
	Evidence Drying	15
	Subcontracting	30
DNA Analysis Unit	Biological Screening	30
	DNA (STR, Y-STR) Analysis	60
	Database Search	5
	CODIS Confirmation*	10
	Kinship Analysis	60
	DNA Analysis Cold Case	(No target TAT)
Crime Scene Response Team	Crime Scene Response	30
Drug Testing Unit	Drug Analysis Examination - Rush	10
	Drug Analysis Examination	100
Firearms and Toolmarks Unit	Firearm Analysis	60
	Firearm Database Search, Tier I	10
	Firearm Database Search, Tier II	45
	Fracture Match Analysis	30

[3] This time frame is expressed as a "turn-around-time" (TAT) – the time that it generally takes for a client agency to receive a service or completed report of examination once a request has been made and, when appropriate, evidence has been submitted.

	Impressions (Shoe and Tire) Analysis	60
	Serial Number Restoration	30
Toxicology Analysis Unit	Drug Analysis	30
	Blood/urine Alcohol Analysis	20
	Breath Alcohol Calibration*	30

*Not a LIMS service

Defining Customer Service[4]

Laboratory personnel strive to provide "value added" service by developing and maintaining good working relationships with laboratory customers. This is accomplished through:

1. Ensuring customer confidentiality.
2. Clarifying ambiguous or incomplete contracts (e.g., service requests) at the time of evidence submission.
3. Involving agency shareholders in possible changes to testing requests in order to provide more relevant and/or probative information (at or near the time of examination).
4. Maintaining dialog with the customer during lengthy examinations (greater than 90 days) in order to report progress or delays, as appropriate, and to keep the customer current.
5. Providing technical advice, guidance, and assistance in matters related to examinations, and the interpretation of analytical results.
6. Seeking feedback from customers that may be used to improve the Laboratory's quality system and technical operations.
7. Presenting seminars and training sessions.

Customer Confidentiality[5]

All employees of the Kern Regional Crime Laboratory shall ensure customer confidentiality at all times (see the Policy on Laboratory Documents and Records QT43889). Except for information that the customer makes publicly available, or when agreed between the Laboratory and the customer, all other information is considered proprietary information and shall be regarded as confidential. The laboratory shall inform law enforcement customers via email or telephone in advance of any information it intends to place in the public domain (e.g., a media

[4] ISO/IEC 17025:2017 7.1.4, 7.1.7, 7.8.7.3, 8.6.2

[5] ISO/IEC 17025:2017 4.2.1, 4.2.2, 4.2.3, 4.2.4

request for public information). If the information is related to a specific case, this communication will be added to the LIMS communication log or Qualtrax case file. Information about a customer of the laboratory obtained from sources other than the customer, shall also be confidential between the customer and the laboratory. The source of the information is confidential to the laboratory and will not be shared with the customer, unless agreed by the source.

Disclaimer

By contracting services with the Kern Regional Crime Laboratory, the customer is agreeing that confidential case information (e.g., case reports, case records, etc.) will be released to the appropriate party as a result of a Subpoena Duces Tecum, request by a state regulatory board, DMV request, a public records request approved by the Assistant District Attorney or their designee, a discovery request for court, as required by law or authorized by contractual arrangements. This agreement serves as a notification to the customer.

Personnel, including any committee members, contractors, personnel of external bodies, or individuals acting on the laboratory's behalf, shall keep confidential all information obtained or created during the performance of laboratory activities, except as required by law according to the Policy on Standards of Conduct and Professional Development (QT43449).

Telephone Service

The Kern Regional Crime Laboratory uses a main line that Administrative Services Unit staff answer to direct the caller to the appropriate unit or individual. In addition, there are direct lines for each Laboratory staff member. All individuals are committed to providing prompt response to customer needs as evidenced through the return of telephone calls within 24 hours or the next business day. Messages shall be addressed within 24 hours or the next business day.

Field Service

The Crime Scene Response Team also provides agencies with an immediate requested service, crime scene response, and represents the Kern Regional Crime Laboratory in the community. The designated Crime Scene Response Team members carry laboratory cellular phones and can be reached during business hours by calling the laboratory’s main number (661-868-5367) and asking for the Crime Scene Response Team. The cellular phones are programmed into the Laboratory’s automated after-hours telephone answering system such that when a customer calls the Laboratory main number outside of 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM Monday through Friday to request crime scene response, the phone system will automatically dial these team members and their back-up responders every 15

minutes until there is an answer. Alternatively, the agency may call the designated crime scene cellular phones directly (cell numbers were provided to agency dispatch service). Crime scene responders must make immediate contact with the requesting agency, and they are expected to be en route from their current location within an hour of the time when the first call was received. Responders must be in close communication with the requesting agency to let them know their estimated arrival time at the crime scene.

Requests for Testing Service[6]

The Administrative Services Unit (ASU) and the Evidence Control Unit (ECU) represent the "face" of the Kern Regional Crime Laboratory's analytical units, interacting directly with agencies that request forensic testing and calibration services. As such, these units serve as a model for customer service within the laboratory.

The Kern Regional Crime Laboratory accepts testing service requests via electronic submission using the Portal software program. The transfer of electronic case information from Portal to the LIMS (the Laboratory Information Management System) together with the physical submission of all associated evidentiary item(s) constitutes a contract between the submitting agency (customer) and the Laboratory.[7] An electronic evidence receipt (Inbound Receipt) generated by the LIMS serves as a tender and is the official receipt of this request.

The evidence items and accompanying Portal information will be reviewed by the ECU at the time of evidence submission. If an evidence submission is not acceptable, then a Memorandum for Evidence Refusal (QT56489) will be attached and the entire submission will be returned to the agency representative for correction. The Memorandum for Evidence Refusal will be completed by ECU personnel and will include all corrections that need to be made before the evidence can be resubmitted to the Laboratory. If an evidence item is rejected due to analytical unit criteria, then the appropriate policy (with the requirement highlighted) will also be attached to the Memorandum for Evidence Refusal.

If a previously rejected evidence submission is resubmitted to the ECU and is not acceptable a second time, then the submission review will be escalated to the Unit Supervisor. If the same evidence submission is rejected more than two times, a Report of Quality Variance will be initiated to determine the root cause of the miscommunication.

It is the responsibility of the appropriate Unit Supervisor, Assistant Laboratory Director, or Laboratory Director to cooperate with customer agencies and their representatives to clarify testing requests and to monitor the Laboratory's work performance. Documentation of these actions shall be made part of the

[6] ISO/IEC 17025:2017 5.7, 7.1.1, 7.1.8

[7] The term "Contract" is defined as an agreement between the Laboratory and its customers (for forensic examinations/analyses). A "Request" is the process utilized by a customer when seeking analysis by the Laboratory. The term "Tender" is the Laboratory's response to the customer regarding a request.

communication log of the affected case file(s). The Quality Assurance Unit shall oversee the preparation, packaging, and dispatch of test and/or calibration items (e.g., sample splits) needed by a representative of the court for verification purposes, or to complete testing the Laboratory is unable to analyze.

Analytical Methods[8]

The Kern Regional Crime Laboratory shall use test and calibration methods, including methods for sampling, which meet the needs of the customer, and which are appropriate for the tests and/or calibrations it undertakes. See the Policy on Externally Provided Products, Services and Subcontracting Work QT38639 for more information on this topic. The Kern Regional Crime Laboratory will notify the customer of any subcontracting arrangements that have been made on their behalf for forensic testing and/or calibration services through a LIMS report of examination.

Disclaimer

It should be noted that by using the services of the Kern Regional Crime Laboratory, customers are agreeing that the Laboratory can use its own procedures and conduct whichever testing on the items that it deems most relevant, and if needed, subcontract the work to a suitable laboratory.

The appropriate Unit Supervisor shall inform the customer, in writing, when a method proposed by the customer is inappropriate or out-of-date. These communications shall be retained in the relevant case file(s). When it is necessary to use methods not covered by standard procedures, these shall be subject to written agreement between the customer and the Laboratory Director and shall include a clear specification of the customer's requirement and the purpose of the test and/or calibration.

The customer shall be informed as to all tests and methods chosen within the Report of Examination provided electronically as .pdf files only after completion of both technical and administrative reviews. See the Policy on Laboratory Documents and Records (QT43889) for more information on receiving reports and case records. The customer agency's name and agency representative will be listed on the report; however, the agency address will not be listed as reports are only provided electronically and are not mailed. In reporting results, it might be appropriate to communicate the opinions and interpretations by direct dialog with the customer.

[8] ISO/IEC 17025:2017 7.1.2, 7.2.1.4, 7.8.2.1, 7.8.7.3

Improving Customer Service[9]

Some testing requests/submissions may require an additional review to clarify the customer's request, determine the probative nature of the evidence, and define the methods to be used (or discuss the limitations and resources available for testing). This review shall be completed and documented by the appropriate Unit Supervisor. The customer shall be informed of any deviation from the initial contract in writing, whether at the time of evidence submission or at the time of examination by the analyst. All such events shall be documented within the relevant case file(s).

The service standards and customer expectations will be measured by Laboratory management by evaluating crime scene response times, examination turn-around-times, any Qualtrax Employee Grievance/Quality Complaint Submission workflow instances and customer satisfaction ratings. The Technical Management Team will conduct an annual evaluation of the Laboratory's customer service and identify opportunities for process improvement at the annual Management Review meeting.

Customer Notification Workflow[10]

The Laboratory shall document communication with its customers when they are affected by the following situations:

- When contractually or legally required to release confidential information, the Laboratory shall notify the customer of what information will be released.
- When the method requested by the customer is considered inappropriate or out of date.
- When there is a deviation from the contract between the Laboratory and the customer.
- When pertinent discussions with a customer relating to the customer's requirements or the results of the laboratory activities take place.
- The extent of database searches (may be communicated in a report).
- When the customer does not specify the method, the Laboratory shall inform the customer of the method chosen.
- When a deviation from the method occurs, it shall be accepted by the customer.
- Communicate to the customer the disposition of all items received (in a report).

[9] ISO/IEC 17025:2017 7.1.1, 7.1.4, 7.1.5, 7.1.7, 7.2.1.7, 7.4.3

[10] ISO/IEC 17025:2017 4.2.2, 7.1.2, 7.1.5, 7.1.8, 7.1.9, 7.2.1.4, 7.2.1.7, 7.4.3, 7.8.7.3, 7.10.1 and AR 3125 7.4.1.1

- Communicate to the customer items collected or created and preserved for future testing (in a report).
- When there is doubt about the suitability of an item for test or calibration, or when an item does not conform to the description provided, the laboratory shall consult the customer for further instructions before proceeding.
- When opinions or interpretations are verbally communicated to the customer.
- When appropriate, notify the customer of nonconforming work.
- When a significant change occurs to the Laboratory's activities that affects the customer.

Documentation of these notifications/communications with customers may be recorded in a Report of Examination, the LIMS Comm Log, the Qualtrax case record and/or as a workflow attachment. For instances where a customer communication does not pertain to a specific case, evidence item, or issue, the Customer Notification Workflow may be used to record the communication.

A Customer Notification workflow may be initiated by any laboratory personnel or as a result of a Report of Quality Variance. The initiator will complete the following:

1. Select the customer
2. Notification Subject
3. Category
4. Notification Assigned To
5. Initial Notification Comments

The workflow will continue to the assigned personnel for completion of the following:

1. Customer Notification Upload
2. Date of Notification
3. Is the notification complete?
4. Is a customer response expected?
5. Customer Notification Comments

If a customer response is not expected, then the workflow will close. If a customer response is expected, then the assigned personnel will continue the workflow and complete the following:

1. Customer Response Upload

2. Customer Response Comments

Upon receipt and upload of the customer response and completion of the communication to the customer's satisfaction, the workflow will be closed.

Quality Complaints[11]

The Laboratory uses a Qualtrax workflow entitled "Employee Grievance/Quality Complaint Submission" to record instances of internal and external complaints and grievances related to the Laboratory's Quality Management System. Note that the investigation and decision on complaints and appeals shall not result in any discriminatory actions. A description of the handling process for complaints is available to any interested party upon request.

Complaints may be received in a variety of formats including in-person, customer feedback surveys, phone, or email. Once a complaint has been received, the Laboratory confirms whether the complaint relates to laboratory activities for which it is responsible and, if so, will gather and verify all necessary information to validate the complaint. An "Employee Grievance/Quality Complaint Submission" workflow instance will be initiated to begin the process of handling and documenting the complaint. The Laboratory is responsible for all decisions at all levels of the handling process for complaints.

The workflow can be initiated by any laboratory personnel and requires the following information: complainant name and agency, topic, description of the issue, supervisor of the affected unit, desired outcome, and option for a document upload.

The workflow moves to the Unit Supervisor and requires a date the issue was discussed with the complainant (acknowledging receipt of the complaint to the complainant), summary of facts gathered and verified (including a root cause analysis), a decision, the action taken in response and option for another document upload. If the issue is one of quality, then the supervisor will initiate a Report of Quality Variance (RQV) workflow and include that RQV number in the Quality Complaint workflow for cross-referencing. The Unit Supervisor must verify that the appropriate action was taken. The workflow moves to the Quality Assurance Officer for review.

When the workflow moves to the Quality Assurance Officer, the following information is required: date of QA discussion with complainant, additional facts adduced, decision of second review including additional actions taken (if any) and an option for a final document upload. The workflow moves to the Laboratory Director for final review if the issue is not resolved during the second review. The final review by the Laboratory Director requires the following information: a date of final review, final decision, final review of facts adduced and document upload for

[11] ISO/IEC 17025:2017 7.9.1, 7.9.2, 7.9.3, 7.9.4, 7.9.5, 7.9.6, 7.9.7

a record of the final communication sent to the complainant. The Laboratory shall provide the complainant or appellant with progress reports (if applicable) and the outcome, whenever possible. The decision (or formal notice signaling the end of the complaint) to be communicated to the complainant or appellant whenever possible, shall be made by, or reviewed and approved by, individual(s) not involved in the original laboratory activities in question.

Customer Feedback[12]

The Evidence Control Unit shall also seek customer feedback through vehicles such as Customer Service Satisfaction Surveys (QT160043) and online surveys, letters to submitting agencies, office e-mail, laboratory staff attendance at multi-agency meetings, etc. Laboratory staff who receive verbal feedback and/or complaints at multi-agency meetings or other locations are responsible for documenting the feedback and sending it to the Quality Assurance Officer and/or initiating an "Employee Grievance/Quality Complaint Submission" workflow, if required, so that the feedback is recorded and moved forward. The Quality Assurance Officer shall regularly report all feedback to the Laboratory Director, who will use it to improve the Laboratory's management system, testing and calibration activities and customer service.

A Report of Quality Variance (RQV) will be initiated in Qualtrax when the agreed requirements of the customer have not been met. If necessary, the Quality Assurance Unit will notify a customer and recall work depending on the extent of the RQV.

DEALING EFFECTIVELY WITH DIFFICULT CUSTOMERS[13]

Employees may have to deal with angry customers. Rarely do these situations turn ugly, but the potential is ever present.

Suggestions for dealing with difficult customers are below; however, this is not a substitution for formal training. When you are unsure of your abilities to deal with a difficult customer, contact your supervisor for assistance.

- Deal with EMOTIONS first:

Ask *open-ended* questions and listen to bring out the customer's feelings. Open-ended questions start with: "Why, When, What, How, Who, Which one, and Describe how…" Open-ended questions create expanded answers, provide background information, and lower the customer's emotional level.

Give empathetic feedback.

[12] ISO/IEC 17025: 2017 8.6.2

[13] County of Kern, County Administrative Office, Policy/Procedures Manual

Summarize the customer's feelings. "I know that you are upset and feel that this is unfair."

- Deal with the PROBLEM:

Ask *closed-ended* questions to determine the specifics of the customer's problems. Close-ended questions start with: "Did, Have, Is there, Do you, Will you, Can you…" Close-ended questions create fact-based information, one-word answers, and focus on facts rather than emotions.

Five-step Process for Addressing Any Customer Problem

Step 1 - Acknowledge the customer. Show the customer the law, ordinance, or regulation you are enforcing.

Step 2 - Assess the situation. Suggest alternatives that will solve the problem.

Step 3 - Affirm your understanding. Agree on a solution and follow through.

Step 4 - Analyze alternatives. Do something extra, if possible.

Step 5 - Agree on a plan. In all cases, speak in a calm, quiet voice.

By affirming your understanding, you will again defuse any negative emotions the customer may be feeling. Ask the customer what can be done to solve the present situation.

SAFETY PRECAUTIONS FOR DEFUSING VIOLENCE[14]

There are five steps to defusing potentially violent situations:

1. Understand the mind-set of the potentially violent person.
2. Take the moral "high road."
   - Establish an atmosphere of cooperation.
   - Do not display anger, fear, or anxiety.
   - Tell the person that this is his or her time and you're willing to respect that.
   - Talk in a calm voice, lower and slower than your counterpart. YOU set the example.
   - Understand that angry outbursts on the part of that person can have a positive effect. It allows the aggrieved person to vent his or her negative feelings and to begin to defuse.

[14] County of Kern, County Administrative Office, Policy/Procedures Manual

- Be absolutely truthful in any discussion with the person. To lose credibility at this stage can be catastrophic.

3. Listen to the aggrieved party and allow a total “airing” of the grievance without comment or judgment.
   - Offer the person a private place to talk.
   - Ask the person to be seated but you take your seat first if possible.
   - Ask the party if you can take a few “brief notes” to help you retain the information.
   - Maintain eye contact—it is a sign of respect, and it indicates that the person is getting your full attention.
   - That person’s perceptions are his or her reality. Do not argue with those perceptions.
   - Do not downplay the importance of the person’s concerns, however seemingly insignificant they are to you.
   - If you talk at all, ask questions that call for long, narrative answers. This does two things: It assures the aggrieved party that you want to hear all he or she has to say, and it assists in the defusing process.
4. Allow the aggrieved party to suggest a solution.
   - A person will more readily agree to a resolution that he or she helped formulate.
   - Assure the person that you will act on any injustices he or she has suffered—then make absolutely sure you do just that.
   - It may surprise you that the person’s suggestions may be very reasonable.
5. Move toward a win-win resolution.

Saving face (dignity) is paramount. Even people facing severe disciplinary action may just want to be heard and “get on with life.”

As you make a concession, ask him or her to do likewise. Try to get “something for something.” In the overwhelming number of cases, the person just wants fairness.

END OF DOCUMENT